

Northern California News & Events

Visiting a Water Project in Redding

Recently, I joined the Family Water Alliance in visiting the Wintu Pumping Plant Fish Screen Project in the Bella Vista Water District in Redding.



The screen is necessary to meet the requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Projects like this one are essential to ensuring certainty to the agriculture, commercial and residential customers of this water district. The dedicated citizens and organizations involved are continuing the tradition of our ancestors who worked so hard to utilize our rivers and make Northern California a place to build strong and prosperous communities. I appreciate the efforts to ensure reliable water service for Redding and the surrounding area.

Pressing for Improvement at the Oakland VA Office

I wanted to follow up on my previous e-update regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs Oakland Regional Office. As you may know, despite past promises from the VA to improve the backlog at the Oakland office, service to our veterans has continued to deteriorate. In late March, I organized a meeting with VA Under Secretary for Benefits Allison Hickey, whose responsibilities include the Oakland office, and I invited a bipartisan group of Northern California members of Congress to join me in expressing strong concern about the ongoing delays. We discussed several methods for improving Oakland's performance, including providing additional training for the Oakland staff, arranging increased contact with Congressional offices, and sending some pending claims to other regional offices for processing. I wanted to share the letter Secretary Hickey sent after the meeting, confirming that she will enact reforms that we discussed.

The Oakland office desperately needs this improvement. It is one of the slowest regional offices in the nation; in December 2011, it had over 30,000 pending claims. On average, it takes the Oakland office almost nine months to process a veteran's original disability claim, and an expedited Notice of Disagreement (NOD) case takes 240 days, over four months above the target processing time and two months longer than the national average. While I am encouraged by the proposals that Secretary Hickey has described, I will continue to closely monitor this situation. The Oakland office must process the claims of Northern California veterans in a timely manner.

Right Now

Promoting Quality Health Care

Recently, the Healthcare Leadership Council acknowledged my efforts to improve health care with their Champion of Healthcare Innovation award. The council is a group of leaders from all disciplines in American health care.



Protecting the Rights of American Sportsmen

I wanted to let you know that the House has passed H.R. 4089, legislation that will strengthen the rights of sportsmen. This bill ensures that federal lands remain accessible for fishing, sport hunting and recreational shooting. Additionally, it reaffirms that the Environmental Protection Agency is prohibited from regulating traditional ammunition and tackle. The legislation became critical after the Obama Administration signaled plans to limit target shooting, firearm hunting and snowmobile use on certain public lands. Meanwhile, fringe groups have urged the Administration to ban the use of lead in ammunition and tackle, which would impose significant costs on sportsmen and undermine the recreation industry. I strongly supported H.R. 4089 because it protects law-abiding citizens who want to exercise their constitutional rights on our federal lands. I urge the Senate to pass the bill quickly and send it to the President.

Recent Past

U.S. - Korea Trade Agreement Takes Effect

Recently, the U.S.-Korea trade agreement entered into effect, giving Northern California farmers, ranchers, and businesses better access to 49 million South Korean consumers. The agreement brings most of South Korea's tariffs on U.S. manufactured and agricultural products to zero, which will boost U.S. exports by \$10 to \$11 billion and support up to 250,000 jobs. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, U.S. agricultural exports to South Korea will increase by \$1.8 billion every year under the agreement. Beyond just the tariff cuts, this comprehensive agreement also addresses regulatory barriers that treat American goods and services unfairly and protects intellectual property rights, further leveling the playing field.

This trade agreement represents significant new opportunities for American businesses to increase sales, helping them to grow and hire workers here at home. I am encouraged that this is only the first of multiple agreements that will be implemented, as the U.S. - Columbia trade agreement is set to take effect on May 15 of this year. It is my hope that the Administration moves just as swiftly to implement the agreement with Panama to create even more job opportunities in Northern California and throughout the U.S.